RETHINKING FEMALE CHASTITY AND GENTLEWOMAN'S HONOUR IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND*

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RUNNING HEAD: RETHINKING FEMALE CHASTITY

ABSTRACT. *Honour was a gendered phenomenon for the eighteenth-century English social elite; scholars have argued that for women, honour was mainly equated with chastity. By problematizing the concept of chastity as well as chastity's relation with women's social reputation, this article questions the widely adopted view of the crucial importance of female chastity for maintaining honour and social status. A critical examination of eighteenth-century discourses of feminine propriety shows that even though chastity was presented as an internal feminine feature, it was evaluated by external signs, making it less dependent on physical continence than on public display of purity. Chastity should thus be seen as a negotiable performative identity rather than a stable state of sexual virtue. Moreover, the relation between chastity and social reputation is more complex than hitherto supposed; even a public loss of chaste reputation did not necessarily lead to the social disgrace threatened by eighteenth-century writers, but could often be compensated through other performative means. The article concludes that not only was chastity's role in the construction of female honour ambiguous, female and male honour also resembled each other more than has been assumed, since they were both based on an external spectacle of proper honourable appearance.*

I

> A Coquet often loses her Reputation, whilst she preserves her Virtue.
> A Prude often preserves her Reputation when she has lost her Virtue.
>
> Joseph Addison on *The Spectator*[1]

The ideal of chaste feminine perfection runs deep in our images of eighteenth-century elite women. In novels of Samuel Richardson, Fanny Burney, and Jane Austen, as well as in eighteenth-century conduct books and periodicals, female honour is routinely presented in a poetic image of a virtuous maiden guarding her chastity as the emblem of her honour. Indeed, eighteenth-century honour was highly gender-specific: 'the whole Story runs on Chastity and

Courage', as Joseph Addison humorously defined the difference between women's and men's honour in *The Spectator* in 1711.[2] Courage was presented as the core of male honour, whereas chastity was forcefully advocated to women as the main ingredient of female honour; in fact, according to didactic books, novels or other printed eighteenth-century material, it was impossible for an elite woman to be honourable if she was not chaste.

This view of chastity's necessity for the eighteenth-century woman's honour has also been generally accepted by modern scholars. Anthony Fletcher has stated that 'a woman's sexual reputation was the whole of her reputation', thereby arguing that chastity was the overriding measure of female honour and, as such, a vital feature of paternalistic social order.[3] Fletcher's interpretation is echoed by, among others, David Turner, who claims that the ideal of a domesticated, desexualized, and innately chaste woman, epitomized by Samuel Richardson's famous heroine Pamela, was a paradigm of eighteenth-century honourable womanhood.[4] Ingrid Tague and G. J. Barker-Benfield have also connected the essentializing of chastity to the culture of sensibility, thus suggesting that the phenomenon was peculiar to eighteenth-century definitions of women's honour.[5] Then again, scholars have also recently argued against such simplistic interpretations of women's honour. Garthine Walker has criticized the tendency to analyze female honour solely in terms of sexual reputation while recognizing the complexity of male honour and the fact that it involved issues such as economic and professional competence, domesticity, morality, and sexual moderation, besides courage. Walker argues that even though female honour was habitually articulated through the language of sexual virtue, it was, in reality, a multifaceted concept constructed on a variety of feminine virtues, such as good housewifery.[6] Laura Gowing has pointed out that women's honour was also heavily influenced by their social and economic status.[7] However, even these critical voices have, as a rule, maintained that chastity was nevertheless 'essentially a prerequisite' of gentlewomen's honour, without which all other honourable efforts were more or less futile.[8]

I want to suggest that these interpretations of feminine chastity have taken eighteenth-century discursive ideals too much at face value, and failed to deliver critical readings of the texts promoting the chastity ideal. The recognition of the importance of social status and wealth as well as domestic competence to the construction of female honour is significant; however, despite this welcome problematization, the specific meaning of 'chastity' remains largely unproblematized in earlier research. Even though chastity has been routinely presented as the main ingredient of female honour, a detailed examination of how exactly chastity was conceptualized in the discursive formulations addressing women's honour is still missing. Accordingly, the influence of the varying eighteenth-century understandings of chastity has not been thoroughly taken into account in scholarly evaluations of the importance of chastity to the maintenance of female honour. Therefore, a closer analysis is called for. Chastity did play a central role in the conceptions of female honour in the eighteenth century. That role, however, did not comprise simply of strict virginity before marriage and unwavering faithfulness thereafter; instead, chastity should be understood as a complex system of performances and presentations. As the quotation from Addison at the beginning of this article suggests, sexual reputation and actual virtue had a complex relationship, in which virginity by no means automatically translated into a chaste reputation. In other words, women's sexual honour was not all about perfect abstinence – it was also a lot about perfect appearance.

Jenny Davidson's analysis of women's hypocrisy shows that chastity was an intricate system of dissimulation and dishonesty, rather than that of straightforward immaculate sexual restraint.[9] In fact, chastity can be viewed as a performative identity, where a person's inner reality is constantly evaluated through external signs. According to Erving Goffman, all human interaction is based on a performance, and through this performance both the 'actor' and the 'audience' give meanings to themselves and their situation. Goffman argues that individuals engage in performances to abide by social norms; by manipulating their appearance, manner, and setting, they communicate appropriate fictional identities to their audience.[10] Indeed, recent

studies have emphasized the theatrical aspects of early modern social identities, and analyzed them as both individual and group-related performances.[11] A similar approach can be applied to female chastity, rendering it no longer a stable state of being or non-being, but rather a Goffmanian stage where external performances create the illusion of chastity. These performances are always open to multiple interpretations, which means that their meaning can never be securely established; therefore, chastity becomes an elusive and circumstantial performative trait that has no necessary connection to an individual's actual status of virginity or fidelity.

Accordingly, I propose that female chastity, left largely unproblematized in previous studies, was actually a highly ambivalent and unstable ideal. As Laura Gowing has noted, gender is always in contest; similarly, chastity as a gendered ideal, as well as chastity's relation to female honour, were in a state of constant redefinition and endlessly discussed in conduct books, periodicals, sermons, novels, and other didactic material addressing women's chastity, honour, and conduct norms.[12] In other words, even though chastity was presented 'the essential feminine virtue', as Robert Shoemaker states, it was by no means a monolith that ruled over women's lives and reputations; instead, it could, to some degree, be negotiated, worked around and compensated by other polite virtues.[13]

The goal of this article is to offer a nuanced analysis on how chastity was conceptualized in eighteenth-century discourses of feminine propriety, and to investigate critically the relation between chastity and gentlewomen's honour and social reputation. I argue, firstly, that even though female chastity was discursively forcefully promoted by essentializing, internalizing, and naturalizing it, it was evaluated mainly by external signs which could be easily counterfeited. Thus, chastity was much less dependent on actual sexual deeds than contemporary commentators would perhaps have liked to admit, or modern scholars have recognized. In fact, many didactic writers acknowledged that the external appearance of chastity was, in the society's eyes, more important for a woman than actual abstinence. Thus, the 'chastity' that was deemed

crucial for female honour was not physical but, instead, performative chastity, based on the external stylization of appearances.

Secondly, I propose that the relationship between chastity, honour, and social reputation was in itself highly complex. Even a public loss of virtuous reputation – that is, an unsuccessful performance of chastity – did not automatically lead to the social ruin and irrecoverable loss of honour described by eighteenth-century didactic writers. Instead, honour was constructed of several overlapping factors, of which chastity, or the appearance of it, was merely one. Loss of chastity could, to some extent, be compensated by skillful management of external appearances. Thus, 'one false step' by no means spelled out 'endless ruin' of a woman's honour, as didactic writers claimed.[14] Considering this together with the extreme emphasis given on external appearance, my conclusion is that absolute female chastity played a lesser and more controversial role in maintaining honour and social status than hitherto supposed.

In addition, this article also offers some insight to more general scholarly discussions on eighteenth-century understandings of honour. The performative aspects of chastity call to question those scholarly views that suggest there was a shift towards internalization of honour at the turn of eighteenth century.[15] Instead, there seems to be no great rift between early modern and eighteenth-century interpretations of honour, both maintaining a focus on external appearances besides internal virtues. Moreover, the external nature of chastity brings conceptualizations of female honour and male honour more closely together than has generally been perceived, both of them being performative demonstrations of virtuous traits rather than essential virtues themselves.

The article frames the concepts of chastity and honour with the eighteenth-century English culture of politeness, which was the privileged discourse addressing and defining social limits to propriety and acceptable conduct. Accordingly, my analysis is based on a variety of didactic material used to discuss the norms and ideals of feminine conduct. The women's conduct book was, alongside with the periodical, one of the most important means of defining

and communicating female propriety; consequently, I have examined more than a dozen titles including, for example, John Essex's *The Young Ladies Conduct* (1722), John Gregory's *Father's legacy to his daughters* (1761), and Hannah More's *Strictures on the modern system of female education* (1799), as well as *The Spectator* (1711–14) and *The Female Spectator* (1744–46). In addition, I draw on another popular eighteenth-century literary medium, the novel; though it does not aim at similar educational treatise of conduct norms as the conduct book and the periodical, the novel nevertheless constructs and comments the norms of female propriety. For discussion on the relation between chastity and social reputation, I have utilized the private correspondence and autobiographical writings of Fanny Burney and Horace Walpole, among others.

My approach to these texts combines readings generally used in cultural history with intellectual historical close reading. I do not attempt to map the intentions of the particular authors, but my goal is, instead, to investigate the deeply gendered understandings surrounding the concepts of chastity and honour within their cultural context, partly by reading the texts 'against the grain'. Thus, I analyze textual sources as repositories of the ideas and conceptualizations of the culture their writers live in. My focus is on the meanings eighteenth-century polite society attached to female chastity; even in the final section of the article where I discuss real-life cases of lost chastity, my goal is not to study social practices as such, but rather to examine the limits of what could be considered as socially tolerable within the context of female honour and politeness. By concentrating on representations of chastity as an allegedly crucial component of female honour, I do not want to imply that chastity was the sole ingredient of female honour; rather, by a detailed examination, I wish to problematize the bond between chastity and honour and to contribute to the research that aims at widening our perspectives concerning eighteenth-century women's culture of honour.

II

Honour is a shifting historical phenomenon. It is tied to specific cultural and social surroundings, since it is defined by codes of propriety that are peculiar to specific groups.[16] Accordingly, eighteenth-century English gentlewomen's honour was linked to English polite society – that is, the upper and middling ranks for whom politeness was the key discourse creating acceptability, propriety, and desirability. Several scholars have suggested that during the seventeenth century there was a shift in the way that honour was perceived in England; for example, Michael McKeon asserts that honour shifted its meaning from 'title or rank' and other external characteristics to 'goodness of character'. This view is also held by Robert Shoemaker, who argues that the internalization of honour shifted the focal point of male honour from public display towards Christian virtues and, accordingly, turned the public against dueling, the heretofore dominant means of demonstrating courage and maintaining male honour. Shoemaker and G. J. Barker-Benfield recognize the influence of Protestantism and, more importantly, politeness that allegedly relocated honour as something private, internal, and not dependent on public recognition; they claim that pre-seventeenth-century notions of honour were external and based on public appearance and portrayal of honourable traits.[17] However, this shift towards internal honour was by no means comprehensive; Markku Peltonen has argued against these scholars, stating that external honour, exemplified by men's dueling, was not antithetical to the new emerging ideals of politeness, and that external honour continued to play a role in eighteenth-century England.[18] Accordingly, this article aims to contribute to Peltonen's stance that external forms of honour were still relevant in the eighteenth century, and also to give a more sophisticated analysis of externality as a theatrical performance.

Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) gives several definitions for the word 'honour', three of which are of interest to us. Johnson firstly defines honour in its external meaning, as 'reputation or fame'. Secondly, he gives it the internalized meaning, 'nobleness of mind'.[19] It would thus appear that honour was recognized both as an external performance and as an internal trait at least as late as the mid-1750s. For the purposes of this article, Johnson's third

definition of honour is the most interesting one – for that definition is 'chastity'. Johnson's examples clearly demonstrate that chastity as a form of honour was reserved solely for women.[20] An examination of eighteenth-century printed material discussing honourable conduct confirms that eighteenth-century writers more or less equated chastity with female honour. Joseph Addison, for instance, writes in *The Spectator* that '[t]he great Point of Honour in Men is Courage, and in Women Chastity. If a Man loses his Honour in one Rencounter, it is not impossible for him to regain it in another; a Slip in a Woman's Honour is irrecoverable'.[21]

Addison's musings on courage and chastity demonstrate some key issues concerning the eighteenth-century discourse on gendered honour. Unlike masculine courage, feminine chastity was thought to be somehow essential in its nature: once lost it could not be recovered. Reverend John Bennett compares women's purity to salt in biblical terms, asking if salt 'have lost its f[l]avour, wherewith shall it be seasoned'.[22] Thus, compared to courage, chastity seems to have been a more internalized quality. Women were thought to *be* either chaste or not, whereas men were seen only to *act* courageously or cowardly, and therefore to be able to regain their honour by different kind of action.[23] Thus, chastity seems, at first sight, to have much in common with the goodness of character and the internalized honour proposed by such scholars as Barker-Benfield and Shoemaker. In what follows, I will show, however, that this interpretation is incorrect, and that chastity was largely based on a similar kind of external performance as courage. Moreover, I want to question any large-scale shift towards an internalization of honour during eighteenth century in the first place.

III

As 'honour' in Johnson's dictionary, 'chastity' can also be seen to contain several different modes. Johnson himself gives chastity two definitions: firstly, 'purity of the body', and secondly, 'freedom from obscenity'.[24] Thus, chastity can be seen to comprise of two aspects: physical continence – translating into virginity before marriage and faithfulness thereafter – and internal

purity of the mind – in short, modesty. In fact, as Ruth Yeazell notes, modesty was increasingly synonymized with sexual virtue and chastity during the eighteenth century.[25] This process of extending chastity's template to comprise not only sexual deeds but also personal qualities is in line with the general internalization of honour, described by Barker-Benfield and Shoemaker. Chastity as the feminine kind of honour accrued multiple meanings and became entangled with more general feminine virtues, such as modesty, meekness, or piety.

A tendency towards rhetorical internalization of chastity is clearly discernible in eighteenth-century discourse on feminine ideality. Many eighteenth-century didactic writers, among them such moralists as James Fordyce, Hester Chapone, and Hannah More, presented chastity as a natural female characteristic. This internality of virtue was linked to a wider understanding of honour, politeness, and good conduct as internalized traits – or, the goodness of character scholars have recognized as a novel concept of politeness that emerged during the eighteenth century, setting it apart from previous courtesy.[26] Indeed, there was a new ethos in women's didactic literature claiming that good conduct was a direct reflection of a virtuous inner self. This is most notably visible in the change of the language used by conduct writers. Ingrid Tague has suggested that a rhetoric of naturalness crept into didactic printed material addressing women's conduct at the beginning of the eighteenth century, replacing the previously used religious rhetoric.[27] Even though Tague carries her point slightly too far – religious rhetoric continued to play a role in women's conduct books throughout the eighteenth century – her observation of the emergence of naturalistic use of language is an important one.[28] This naturalization targeted especially chastity, the virtue deemed the most important female characteristic. Thus, chastity became, in addition to a moral duty, a natural feminine trait.[29]

Chastity's naturalization tied it all the more closely to modesty, which was represented as an innate quality defending women against men's approaches and guarding their virtue.[30] 'There is a native dignity, an ingenuous modesty to be expected in your sex, which is your natural protection from the familiarities of the men', writes the Scottish professor of

medicine John Gregory in his popular conduct book.[31] Modesty was a complex notion; it was simultaneously a characteristic, displaying virtuous mind, sobriety, and meekness, and a regulator of women's behaviour. Moreover, the exact relationship between chastity and modesty was complicated. Modesty as the indicator of a pure mind can be seen as the internal aspect of chastity; however, modesty was not only an internal quality, but it was thought to have a straightforward impact on a person's body and external appearance. Through its external manifestations, modesty could be read and interpreted from the surface of the female body. Thus, modesty was thought to form both an internal reality and its external representation. In other words, chastity can be seen to comprise of, firstly, physical continence, and secondly, internal modesty and the external performance of it. Chastity is thus not entirely synonymic to modesty; rather, modesty forms a part of chastity, but chastity includes a physical aspect in addition to it.

Modesty was thought to have an impact on almost every aspect of a woman's behaviour. A modest woman would have 'calm and meek looks'; she would 'refine [her] language' and 'modulat[e] the tone and accent' of her speech; and she would avoid 'all lightness of carriage' and 'wanton glances' that would show her to be 'so weary of her honor, that the next comer may reasonably expect a surrender, and consequently be invited to the Assault'.[32] Thus, female modesty regulated not only women's behaviour, but men's as well; a woman void of modesty was thought to be fair game to unscrupulous men and could 'expect to be insulted and affronted by every rake she meets'.[33] Modesty was deemed such an inseparable aspect of female chastity that an immodest woman was portrayed as an unnatural monster:

> And if we consider Modesty in this sense, we shall find it the most indispensable requisite of a woman; a thing so essential and natural to the sex, that every the least declination from it, is a proportionable receding from Woman-hood; but the total abandoning it ranks them among Brutes, … an Impudent Woman is lookt on as a kind of Monster, a thing diverted and distorted from its proper form.[34]

With this rhetorical manoeuvre, sexual purity was introduced as a woman's natural condition, meaning that breaches of chastity shook the very essence of not only the perpetrator's femininity but her very humanity.

However, as Yeazell points out, the very fact that women's allegedly natural modesty needed to be 'elaborately codified and endlessly discussed' shows that women's chastity was, in effect, built on a 'ticklish foundation', as Bernard Mandeville put it – not on a sturdy, natural, innate one.[35] In fact, there was a multitude of dissonant voices refuting the naturalness of feminine chastity, and rather ascribing it to strict self-control. For instance, it was apparent for Mandeville that sexual appetite was 'innate both in Men and Women', and the absence of carnal desires in women appeared unnatural to him; the force of education only made it an improper topic of public conversation.[36] Moreover, he argued that since women have the capability of sexual pleasure, their continence is always susceptible to temptation; whether they be 'Virtuous or not Virtuous, when this Passion is once rais'd to the *critical* Height, it is absolutely irresistible'.[37] Therefore, as *The Polite lady* reminded women, chastity required 'firmness of mind' as well as 'resolution and perseverance'.[38] The same book advised women to 'shun all kind of luxury and intemperance, which is doubly an enemy to this virtue of chastity', both raising passions and making the mind less capable of rational regulation.[39] Another ladies' conduct manual concluded that 'those who want Resolution, want Chastity'.[40]

Thus, there were two parallel views of the female nature: either sexually cold and chaste, to whom chastity came naturally – or licentious and sexually active, to whom chastity was a disciplinary effort. There was nothing fundamentally new in this; as Laura Gowing argues, ideas of women's sexual passivity (as a result of their cold and moist humoural pathology) and their unrestrained carnal desires (as daughters of Eve) existed alongside each other already in the seventeenth century.[41] What was new in the eighteenth century was the gradual change in rhetoric that affected especially the notion of women's sexual coldness; its humoural basis was slowly being replaced by a novel language of naturalness. This rhetorical shift is indicative of a

profound change in conceptualizations of sex that was taking place in the eighteenth century; the emergence of naturalizing language, aiming to impose a natural or sexed difference between genders, can be read as a symptom of a gradual move from what Thomas Laqueur calls one-sex model towards a two-sex model.[42]

Rather than fixed or opposed mentalities, the two notions of women's sexual nature should be seen as alternative tools for negotiating different kinds of claims within the chastity discourse. The new reading of women's sexual coldness, now backed up by assertions of biological sexual difference, made it possible to claim that chastity was an innate female characteristic. Therefore, it was a handy tool that provided the vocabulary and seeming authority for debating and demanding female chastity. Then again, the accounts based on the view of women as sexually active imposed a different kind of discipline on women, urging them to restrain their sexual behaviour. The demands for restraint were often based on arguments of chastity being a moral, religious, or civic female duty. In other words, both models imposed claims of female chastity, only using different kind of leverage. It should be also noted that eighteenth-century writers' understandings of women's sexual nature were only rarely entirely consistent, and many writers saw it necessary to accompany claims of women's natural chastity with requests of self-control. For example, Hannah More, a staunch moralist and ardent proponent of women's 'natural modesty' and 'moral distinctions between the sexes', yet believed that 'an early habitual restraint' was necessary for women's social success, and abstaining from dangerous friendships or reading vital for their chastity.[43]

IV

Regardless of chastity's origins – be they either natural or disciplinary – it was never thought sufficient for a woman merely to *be* chaste. Instead, chastity had to be clearly visible to others. Therefore, chastity can be seen not only as a state of sexual (in)action, but also as a performative identity, which is created through an interplay where an individual acts out her identity through

external signs, which are recognized and interpreted by an audience. This process is essentially theatrical; according to Erving Goffman, everyday interaction can be viewed as an intricate play where people act the roles they ascribe for themselves. Goffman argues that through controlling their appearances, gestures, and manners, as well as their settings, individuals bring forward desired impressions and, in this way, construct the self they want to portray to their audience.[44]

Chastity-as-performance was acted out in the language of modesty. Chastity's intimate connection to modesty suggested that sexual purity would automatically have a visible influence on the body. Modesty was thought to steer 'every part of the outward frame' into a chaste appearance and to 'guid[e] and regulat[e] the whole behavior'.[45] In other words, didactic writers believed that a chaste mind would show itself in specific external signs, readable and interpretable by other members of polite society – and similarly, that an impure mind would reveal itself through the body: 'Every indecent curiosity, or impure fancy, is a deflowering of the mind, and every the least corruption of them, gives some degrees of defilement to the body too'.[46] The idea was that the body would truthfully reflect the state of women's inner virtue. This notion of body's transparency had its roots in the more general ideas of politeness. An emerging understanding of politeness as internal goodness translated into sentimental beliefs that the body was a truthful mirror of the self, and would unerringly reflect the state of a person's internal virtue.[47]

Importantly, the external representation of modesty was thought to indicate not only a pure mind, but also a pure body. 'She who values not the virtue of modesty in her words and dress, will not be thought to set much price upon it in her actions', argued Richard Steele.[48] Modesty as an internal characteristic could only be evaluated through its external manifestations; however, contemporaries took these manifestations to stand for both the purity of mind *and* physical continence, thus assimilating the two definitions of chastity. Therefore, chastity's external performative signs were, in effect, convergent with modesty's signs, since modesty was taken to indicate chastity automatically.

The various signs of chastity were endlessly debated and meticulously defined within the discourse of honour and politeness. A poem where an anonymous admirer praises the heroine's feminine modesty in *Evelina* aptly condenses the external signs of chastity:

See last advance, with bashful grace,
Downcast eye, and blushing cheek,
Timid air, and beauteous face,
Anville, – whom the Graces seek.[49]

Bashfulness, timid air, and downcast eyes were all important signs of virtue, but blushing was perhaps considered to be the most requisite one. 'An unaffected blush is an indication of real modesty. … They, who have a proper sense of the dignity of the female character, will regard it as an exterior symbol of interior purity', wrote one conduct book writer, and another praised 'the graceful blush of modesty' as an 'emanatio[n] of a virtuous mind'.[50] A prudent choice of dress was also imperative: 'A modest Dress has been considered as the shield of Virtue. It is an indication of a mind that is chaste and delicate', emphasized John Burton.[51]

However, things were not this straightforward. Since all the signs of chastity were openly discussed, the fact that debauched women could imitate these signs to hide their loss of virtue was a constant concern for contemporary critics.[52] For example, blushing was considered to be such a definitive proof of a mind untainted by breaches of chastity that it became a necessity of a chaste womanly appearance. This led to different means of artificial blushing for those women not able to blush naturally for one reason or another. Applying rouge or pinching the cheeks could produce a good-enough imitation of the real thing – at least in the fears of concerned authors, as Henry Fielding's *Shamela* demonstrates: 'I behaved with as much Bashfulness as the purest Virgin in the World could have done. The most difficult Task for me was to blush; however, by holding my Breath, and Squeezing my Cheeks with my Handkerchief, I did pretty well'.[53]

Other signs were also easily counterfeited, and according to some commentators, these dissimulations took place regrettably often. James Fordyce complained that 'the most unchaste dispositions' so often hid 'under the mask of an attire the most modest' that it was no longer possible for a virtuous young woman to dress modestly without getting accused of affectation.[54] Mary Wollstonecraft lamented in her early book on women's education that it was 'easier to copy the cast of countenance, than to cultivate the virtues which animate and improve it', concluding that many women were only 'whitened sepulchres, and careful only about appearances'.[55] The Pamela controversy of the 1740s is perhaps the best demonstration of the tremendous anxiety caused by the possibility of faked modesty, *Shamela* and other parodies highlighting the supposed danger posed by artful women to men and the whole society.[56]

Fears of counterfeited chastity were connected to a wider debate over theatrical behaviour and its hypocritical nature. Lawrence Klein has, among others, argued that eighteenth-century politeness theorists – such as Addison and Steele or the third earl of Shaftesbury – condemned theatrical politeness as insincere and morally corrupt; influenced by John Locke's ideas of 'inward Civility', they instead advocated honesty and sincerity as the foundation of true politeness, believing internal goodness to imprint the body automatically with pleasing appearance and manners.[57] The belief on modesty's automatic influence on the body stemmed from these ideas. However, as Goffman argues, theatrical dissimulation is an inevitable aspect of all social interaction and identity construction, no matter how sincerely meant – and English polite society was well aware of this paradox. According to Phil Withington, early modern writers were deeply preoccupied by the implications of the theatrical dimensions of social life and selfhood.[58] Furthermore, as Markku Peltonen has demonstrated, the problematic relationship between an individual's external behaviour and internal self caused many writers to question the Lockean internalist view of politeness altogether, and instead subscribe to early modern theatrical views of good conduct, where politeness was worn like a mask to cover the internal self; indeed, performative ideals of external politeness continued to influence the English conceptualizations

of good conduct throughout the eighteenth century.[59] For such writers, the link between internal virtue and external appearance was much more equivocal.

There was thus an eighteenth-century debate about chastity that, in many ways, pivoted on questions of internality (naturalness, essentialism, innateness, 'nobleness of mind') and externality (appearance, performance, theatricality, 'reputation or fame'). What is noteworthy is the fact that all writers, regardless of their opinions of modesty's relationship with external appearances, seemed to agree that the performative aspect of chastity was vitally important – because it was the only aspect that could, in effect, be evaluated. For those Lockeans who believed that the body reflected the self truthfully and that, accordingly, inner virtue was directly translated into external show, a woman missing the external signs of chastity could not be chaste. Then again, for those who favoured a more theatrical view of politeness and social interaction, seeing the body as an opaque canvas on which desired identity could be painted on, the appearance of chastity *was* chastity. This should not be taken to mean that the proponents of theatricality did not care about inner virtue or condoned vice; they merely believed there was no necessary link between the appearance and the inner self. As *The Polite lady* concluded, 'there may be an appearance of virtue, where there is no reality'.[60]

V

Besides correct appearances, a proper setting was also vitally important for the chaste performance.[61] Chastity was thought to depend heavily on being seen in the right circumstances. A woman of good character could scarcely go out by herself, and meeting men without a chaperone was deemed highly risky. The danger of being associated with morally questionable people proved 'the necessity of your never appearing in public … without the guide and protection of your friends and relations' for John Burton.[62] Indeed, as *The Lady's Companion* stated, '[a]s it is the Concern of every Woman to keep herself strictly within the Bounds of *Modesty* and *Virtue*, there is nothing more important to them, than a judicious Choice of their

Company'.[63] To be seen in a morally dubious place, such as an obscure coffee-house, was considered equally dangerous.

Then again, eighteenth-century English polite culture was epitomized by polite sociability that took place in public or semi-public space. The eighteenth century witnessed an urban renaissance, where rapid changes in public space and public diversions gave birth to a new kind of social culture based on public display.[64] Being seen in public was an implicit aspect of politeness, as well as necessary for the whole process of identity construction. Without audience, there was no honour. Nevertheless, public exposure was thought to be perilous for women in many ways. In *Camilla*, public display is represented as a threat to 'natural' feminine modesty and domestic virtue. Edmund watches with concern Camilla's participation in public pleasures, wondering whether she has the 'discretion' and 'fortitude' to withstand the corruptive effects of publicity:

> Will it not spoil her for private life; estrange her from family concerns? render tasteless and insipid the conjugal and maternal characters, meant by Nature to form not only the most sacred of duties, but the most delicious of enjoyments? … Alas! thought he, the degradation from the true female character is already begun! already the lure of fashion draws her from what she owes to delicacy and propriety, to give a willing reception to insolence and foppery!'[65]

Thus, women's public outings were doubly risky, since the 'true female character' was, despite its allegedly natural virtue, nevertheless deemed unstable enough to be liable to moral corruption by indelicate influences. Moreover, an improperly conducted public appearance could risk the successful performance of chastity's external signs – and as conduct writers claimed, even the slightest hint of indecency could prove fatal.

For many didactic writers, a woman's reputation was, indeed, no less brittle than it was beautiful. The mere appearance of guilt was thought to be enough to ruin it, as the moralist

John Burton's advice in his conduct book illustrates: '*To avoid the appearance of evil* is as expedient as to avoid the *evil itself*.'[66] Burton continues:

> As the most brilliant Jewel is soonest deprived of it's [*sic*] lustre, so is female reputation the most liable to tarnish. It is obscured even by the breath of slander. You ought, therefore, to avoid every appearance of evil. For though your thoughts and intentions may be perfectly pure and innocent, yet from a World, who judge only by externals, … the most injurious, though groundless inferences may be drawn.[67]

As Burton clearly states, the society judged women's virtue solely by external appearance. Thus, if a woman was seen wearing the wrong dress in the wrong crowd in the wrong place, her honour could be called into question even if her physical chastity was intact. Burton's view was echoed by countless other contemporary writers throughout the long eighteenth century. 'You must be very cautious not to [bring] a Cloud upon your Reputation, which may be deeply wounded, though your Conscience is unconcerned', wrote Marquis of Halifax in 1688.[68] *The Ladies Calling* demanded that women, in order to make their 'Vertue as illustrious as they can', would abstain 'as from all real evil, so from every appearance of it too'.[69] Such authors as Hester Chapone, Hannah More, and Fanny Burney, among others, voiced similar notions.[70] Indeed, since 'it is only by appearances [the world] can judge', a woman's virtue was 'nearly the same, in effect', as her reputation, as James Fordyce concluded.[71]

In other words, even though didactic writers emphasized the importance of natural modesty and internalized chastity, they simultaneously acknowledged that the only way of assessing an individual's state of chastity was her performative external appearance. Moreover, they interpreted the external manifestations of modesty as indicative of not only a pure mind but also physical continence. This, of course, made the performance of chastity to weigh more on the scale than the actual state of sexual action, meaning that women could, in theory, have been able to engage in extramarital sexual encounters without losing their chaste reputation, provided they were able to maintain the external appearance of modesty and, thus, chastity.

Mary Wollstonecraft was one to criticize this understanding of female chastity. As Jenny Davidson has noted, Wollstonecraft attacks in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* the dominant conduct book ideal of female chastity 'as a "system of dissimulation" that obliges women to sacrifice the substance of morality for the show of it'.[72] She specifically targets feminine modesty, the characteristic identified as essential to chastity, denouncing it as hypocrisy and, as such, a danger to the morality of the whole society. Wollstonecraft writes that 'it is reputation, and not chastity and all its fair train, that [women] are employed to keep free from spot, not as a virtue, but to preserve their station in the world', and calls for a reformation of female manners towards true chastity instead of false modesty.[73] In Wollstonecraft's mind, 'modesty is the effect of chastity', not vice versa – and, therefore, women should strive towards sexual continence instead of an affected performance of modesty.[74] In other words, Wollstonecraft criticizes all the aspects of female chastity mentioned above: the fact that it was judged solely by externals signs which were easy to fake, and the fact that reputation was more important to women's social status than actual virtue.

Wollstonecraft's critique demonstrates that maintaining chastity in the eighteenth century was ultimately an external performance. Chastity was, of course, discursively defined as sexual continence, but as Wollstonecraft complains, in practice the spectacle of modesty had overtaken chastity's 'true' meaning. Even more importantly, Wollstonecraft's critique highlights the complex relationship between chastity, honour, and social status. Chastity-as-performance had a considerable impact on a woman's reputation – that is, external honour; chastity was not its sole component, but certainly an important one. Thus, chastity, understood as a performative identity, had a significant role as a social booster, which on the one hand made physical chastity relatively unimportant, and on the other hand made the loss of reputation potentially hazardous.

In other words, despite the widely used naturalizing and internalizing rhetoric, chastity was not an innate female characteristic; instead, female chastity should be understood as a set of performances that, much like masculine courage, was acted out and evaluated through

visible signs and acts. Scholars have also argued that other aspects of male honour were deeply performative; self-fashioning was a key element of gentlemanly social performance and respectability, and scholars have, in the wake of Stephen Greenblatt, emphasized the theatrical elements of performing male honour in terms of correct appearance and conduct.[75] Thus, the theatrical nature of chastity implies that male and female honour were, in fact, essentially similar. The difference between the two seems to be on the discursive level, where courage was never naturalized to the extent chastity was. This also means that male and female honour, constructed more or less in similar terms in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, did not drift apart into incommensurability during the eighteenth century, as, for example, Faramerz Dabhoiwala claims; instead, eighteenth-century notions of honour retained much of the early modern emphasis on externality and show.[76]

VI

The intensity of the public concern over women's chastity and its precarious state suggest that the matter was obviously important to the eighteenth-century polite society. In fact, the naturalizing rhetoric of the chastity discourse and the desire to prove that chastity was an essential quality for women indicate that controlling women's sexuality was seen as a matter of vital importance for the entire polite society. Emma Major has underlined the moralizing effect that women were thought to have on the whole society, which means that women's chastity had wide civic and patriotic repercussions.[77] The English patrilineal transmission of property and the wish to ensure rightful inheritance by female chastity further enhanced chastity's social importance.[78] Besides, women's chastity was intimately tied to their husband's reputation; the image of a cuckolded man was a general laughing stock, because it represented pitiable inability to control one's wife as a proper head of household should, and thereby violated patriarchal society's gender roles.[79] Therefore, demands for women's sexual self-control were negotiated in a number of ways.

Indeed, the sheer variety and volume of reasoning used to convince women on the benefits of chastity suggests that not all women found themselves naturally void of carnal desires – and that didactic writers themselves had little faith in their own rhetoric of chastity's innateness. Chastity was, firstly, claimed to be almost a civic duty for women, since their virtuousness allegedly affected the national morality of England.[80] Secondly, chastity was presented as useful for women in different ways; it was stated to be the first and foremost polite characteristic, without which all good manners would be useless.[81] Furthermore, chastity was also portrayed as the trait that would most appeal to men; in fact, writers claimed that chaste women would have no lack of eligible suitors, whereas lewd women would never secure a husband.[82] Thus, as Ingrid Tague notes, a chaste woman was paradoxically viewed simultaneously as a figure of both sexual restraint and sexual allurement; demure behaviour and downcast eyes were regarded as a sign of feminine purity, while they were also thought to attract men at the same time.[83]

In case these arguments failed, women were also intimidated into being chaste by threatening them with the repercussions of lost chastity. According to didactic literature, a woman who lost her innocence would be cast off from their family, friends, and the entire polite society.[84] For example, when the married Maria Rushworth elopes scandalously with another man in Austen's *Mansfield Park*, she automatically becomes a lost case. Her father sends her to live alone with her aunt in a 'remote and private' part of England, never to be admitted to the presence of her family again. Sir Thomas's reasons for this are both moral and polite; he not only would not endanger the morals of the rest of his children, possibly tainted by association, but also 'he would never have offered so great an insult to the neighbourhood as to expect it to notice her'. [85]

Most of all, Sir Thomas tries to shield the social status of the whole family, now jeopardized by the shame of one of its members. For, as Laura Gowing argues, a woman's honour was not her own, but it was closely tied to the honour of her whole family.[86] According

to Richard Steele, 'a woman that has lost her honour and reputation is the contempt even of those that betrayed her to it, and brings a perpetual blot on her name and family'.[87] Another writer states that 'A false step … in your Sex, does not confine its ignominy to the guilty, but it is extended to those, who are connected to you by the dearest ties. At least, however innocent they may be, … yet they feel themselves hurt, and seem to share the disgrace'.[88] Thus, shunning fallen women was seen to be necessary for the protection of family honour but also for the protection of the whole society against moral lewdness – after all, 'the safety of a state' *did* allegedly depend 'upon the virtues of the Women'.[89]

VII

Thus far, I have argued that even though chastity as a performative identity was, indeed, an important component of women's honour, chastity as physical continence was not essential for maintaining a virtuous female reputation. In the final section of this paper, I will further analyze the relation of chastity-as-performance with women's honour and social reputation. As it turns out, even this relation was complex, since even a public loss of a chaste reputation did not automatically lead to social ruin. Social status, reputation, and respectability were constructed from different, overlapping pieces, all centered on managing external appearances; the appearance of chastity was an important piece of the puzzle, but so were class, connections, patronage, wealth, and even location. Accordingly, a failure in one area of social reputation could, in many cases, be compensated by industrious effort in another.

It is evident that elite women did not follow the instructions provided by the conduct manuals religiously – quite the opposite. For example, Amanda Vickery has argued that women adhered to the ideals of domesticity only to a limited degree, some even preferring a public life to a private one. Even though public space was presented as hazardous for women, they 'trafficked numerous public venues without the least criticism and used simple strategies to protect their reputations at more risqué diversions'.[90] Similarly, many discursive 'truths' about

chastity seem to have been simply conduct-book ideals. For example, a virtuous young lady complained in *The Spectator* that her conscious virtue did not deliver her the promised admiration:

> *Dear Mr.* SPECTATOR, I am a young Woman of Eighteen Years of Age, and, I do assure you, a Maid of unspotted Reputation, founded upon a very careful Carriage in all my Looks, Words and Actions. At the same time I must own to you, that it is with much constraint to Flesh and Blood that my Behaviour is so strictly irreproachable; for I am naturally addicted to Mirth, to Gaiety, to a Free Air, to Motion and Gadding. Now what gives me a great deal of Anxiety, and is some Discouragement in the Pursuit of Virtue, is, that the young Women who run into greater Freedoms with the Men are more taken Notice of than I am. The Men are such unthinking Sots, that they do not prefer her who restrains all her Passions and Affections and keeps much within the Bounds of what is lawful, to her who goes to the utmost Verge of Innocence, and parlies at the very Brink of Vice, whether she shall be a Wife or a Mistress.[91]

Thus, it seems that women's reputation was not lost quite as easily as didactic writers portrayed, nor did chastity necessarily attract men more than sexual looseness. Didactic literature constructed reality rather than straightforwardly reflected it, and the various practices related to chastity could differ from discursive idealities as much as the discursive idealities differed from each other.

One of the most unequivocal claims about chastity was that a debauched woman would be ostracized from polite society. However, even a public loss of character did not necessarily result in the social disgrace threatened by didactic literature. The fourth earl of Chesterfield claimed that 'the reputation of chastity is not so necessary for a woman … for it is possible for a woman to be virtuous, though not strictly chaste', and, in a later letter, that 'slip or two may possibly be forgiven her, and her character may be clarified by subsequent and continued good conduct'.[92] Moreover, Richard Steele complained that even though shunning fallen women 'would have a good effect on the guilty, who would be ashamed to be thus singled out and discriminated', this in reality was not done; instead, adulteresses 'are suffered to mix with

the best societies, like hunted deer in a herd', where 'they flatter themselves they are indiscernible'.[93]

There are, in fact, several cases in which women were able to continue their lives in polite society despite losing their public reputations and virtuous name.[94] This was most common amongst nobility, who had abundance of other resources with which to compensate a loss of chastity; a good reputation could be maintained with the protection of family, with a wealthy and respectable lifestyle, or simply with a rank high enough. Partly for these reasons, the uppermost nobility was often seen to have a moral code of their own, being often accused of moral corruption by the middling ranks.[95] Accordingly, the rules of honour were more binding the lower a person's social status was. According to Eliza Haywood, all women below the uppermost aristocracy were those 'who were not placed so high as to have their actions above the Reach of Scandal', but 'who have Reputations to lose, and who are not altogether so independent, as not to have it their Interest to be thought well of by the world'.[96] In other words, as Amanda Vickery argues, the lower spheres of polite society – the women of the lesser gentry, the genteel trades, and the respectable old professional families – were all dependent on their reputations, especially on chaste ones, simply because they had fewer resources with which to compensate the loss of reputation.[97]

However, even women with little wealth or connections could, to some extent, preserve their reputation through a skillful management of appearances – for the dominance of external appearances over internal virtue facilitated negotiating honour in cases where public reputation was lost. As David Hume wrote in *Treatise of Human Nature*, appearances tended to trump even factual knowledge:

> There are many particulars in the point of honour both of men and women, whose violations, when open and avow'd, the world never excuses, but which it is more apt to overlook, when the appearances are sav'd, and the transgression is secret and conceal'd. Even those, who know with equal certainty, that the

fault is committed, pardon it more easily, when the proofs seem in some measure oblique and equivocal, than when they are direct and undeniable.[98]

Or, as *The Lady's Preceptor* advised, 'One who is guilty of all those Transgressions, which we'll rather imagine than mention, if she will but put on the Mask of Bashfulness and Modesty, will please at least in this respect, and under that Veil conceal the Irregularities of her Heart, especially from those who have not had flagrant Proofs of them'.[99] Indeed, even the moralist Richard Steele thought that a woman should never acknowledge her indiscretions, even if that meant living in a constant fear that they would at any moment become public knowledge, for –

though an open defiance of reproach may cure the fear; yet it proves the fault; whereas in the impeachment of others, there is place for doubts, and charity may incline some to disbelieve it. To justify the fact makes the evidence uncontrollable, and renders the offender doubly infamous; for besides the infamy which adheres to the crime, there is a distinct portion due to the impudence.[100]

Thus, maintaining honourable appearances could save a woman's reputation even in the face of damning evidence. Such is the case of Mary Cholmondeley (1729–1811), a society hostess and daughter of an Irish bricklayer. In spring 1780, Fanny Burney wrote in her journal that Mary Cholmondeley, an intimate member of Burney's circle of friends, was guilty of a sexual indiscretion, which gave the cautious Burney a cause to avoid '*publicly* associating' with her.[101] However, Cholmondeley's faux pas was carefully hushed up, and her close friend Horace Walpole took the trouble of supporting her station, never indicating that there was any obscurity concerning her reputation.[102] Consequently, Cholmondeley's reputation suffered no permanent damage. She remained a favourite in literary circles – and two years later, Fanny Burney records having accepted a dinner invitation at Sir Joshua Reynolds's expressly to meet her; indeed, the two continued their friendship as if nothing had happened.[103]

As Cholmondeley's case shows, much depended on the willingness of friends and family to participate in maintaining the appearance of respectability. Even though Henrietta Knight (1699–1756) swore to the last that her infatuation with a certain young cleric was purely 'Platonick', it did not prevent her husband from banishing her to Warwickshire for the rest of her life.[104] Then again, despite the widespread publicity of Henrietta Godolphin's (1681–1733) affair with the poet William Congreve, the protection of her complacent husband, along with her wealth, preserved her social status.[105] Indeed, the fact that women's sexual reputation was closely connected to men's honour often worked for their benefit. Francis Godolphin's public acknowledgement of his wife Henrietta's misdoings would have exposed him as an object of ridicule. Therefore, men's desire to protect their own honourable reputation could also help fallen women to keep up the appearance of virtue.

The extreme emphasis given to externals – status, appearance, and social decorum – was paramount in women's attempts to maintain their social reputation. Ingrid Tague has argued that 'social power and the demands of politeness vied with the ostensibly unalterable effects of a woman's lost chastity, and the outcome was far from predetermined'.[106] Ironically, the obligations of politeness often prevented the social ruin designated upon adulterous women by the politeness discourse. Furthermore, politeness as an opaque control of exteriors played an important role in the management of these women's reputations. For example, Henrietta Howard's (c.1688–1767) skillful maintenance of external appearances ensured her continued social success despite a public separation of her husband. As a mistress of King George II, Howard was careful not to display her affair with the king publicly in any way – which also included avoiding getting pregnant.[107] Howard's discretion enabled her acquaintances even to pretend that they knew nothing of her shameful affair. Horace Walpole gave Howard's refined behaviour as the main reason for her continued respect:

[H]aving no bad qualities, and being constant to her connections, she preserved uncommon respect to the end of her life; and from the propriety and decency of her behaviour was always treated as if her virtue had never been questioned; her friends even affecting to suppose that her connection with the king had been confined to pure friendship.[108]

In other words, Henrietta Howard's own good qualities and universal politeness helped her maintain her social status despite the scandal. As Walpole stated, 'she owed to the dignity of her own behaviour … the chief respect that was paid to her'.[109] Similarly, the adulterous Lady Diana Beauclerk, originally called 'a whore' by Samuel Johnson, eventually procured the doctor's esteem by her 'charms' and good qualities, and ended up preserving her social position; according to Horace Walpole, she was an active and popular socialite, and a friend of the archbishop of Canterbury.[110] Thus, dexterous management of external appearances and clever use of politeness could, in many cases, smooth away questions of impropriety and enable continued social respect.

Then again, badly managed appearances could very well lead women into social ruin. Lady Sarah Bunbury (1745–1826) was forced to retreat to the country after leaving her husband for Lord William Gordon, whose child she was expecting. As Hannah Greig observes, the simple fact of adultery was not the sole trigger behind her expulsion, for she already had a long history of extramarital affairs before Gordon. Rather, Lady Sarah's pregnancy made her adultery 'far more public than might otherwise have been the case', and her rash decision to abandon her husband and abscond with her lover further highlighted the breach of social decorum.[111] However, even after a public scandal and a twelve-year rural exile, it is noteworthy that Lady Sarah, aided by a second marriage to George Napier, was able to re-enter her former London circles under her new married name. In fact, it was generally possible for adulterous women to retreat from the limelight for a year or two, and then to reinstate themselves to polite society under the protection of their family, or quite commonly, a new husband. Greig points

out that divorce often provided a means of reinvention for these women, and a new name could be all the external camouflage needed to regain former social status.[112]

In other words, maintaining honour and social respectability was not a mechanistic system; rather, it entailed managing multiple factors, all centered on external appearances. If a woman would fail in chastity, she could, to some extent, compensate her slip with other aspects of respectable externals, such as politeness, high rank, or family protection.

VIII

To go back to the quotation from *The Spectator* with which I started this article, my goal has been to show that acting the prude could, indeed, preserve a woman's reputation, even if her virtue had been lost. Chastity was not simply a state of sexual purity; it was also and more importantly a performative system of dissimulation, focused on maintaining appearances. As such, it could be manipulated and used to create the appearance of virtue where actual innocence was lost. Moreover, even though this performative chastity was an important aspect of honourable reputation, its absence could often be compensated in different ways. The relation between the didactic rhetoric and reality was thus misguiding in the sense that women had, in reality, more leeway than the discursive formulations seem to indicate at first sight.

This should not be taken to mean that all chaste performances were dishonest; on the contrary, majority of women most likely did adhere to physical chastity in addition to the external display of it. However, since external signs were polite society's only means of measuring chastity, there was always a gap between an individual's behavior and her actual state of chastity – and within that gap, women like Henrietta Godolphin or Henrietta Howard could find some freedom of sexual action, otherwise denied of them. All in all, the concept of chastity, as well as chastity's relation to female honour were more problematic than scholars have thus far acknowledged.

Regarding the more general question of women's honour, my argument has been that a more nuanced analysis of chastity further enlightens our understanding on gentlewoman's honour in eighteenth-century England. I have demonstrated that, firstly, external representations of honour continued to exist and significantly contribute to women's honour alongside with internal honour and good character. What we see is thus a continuation of earlier conceptualizations of honour rather than any significant shift towards internalization of honour. Secondly, as recent studies have shown, female honour was not constructed solely on chastity but stemmed from various factors that contributed to women's reputation – such as housewifery, piety, and non-sexual morality. To add to this, a more careful consideration of chastity reveals that even the concept that was rhetorically advocated as 'the whole' of a woman's reputation had, in fact, an ambiguous role in the construction of that reputation. Female honour should, therefore, be seen as a phenomenon equally complex as male honour, since even the concept of chastity itself evades any simplifying interpretation.

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* I am very grateful to Lawrence E. Klein, Markku Peltonen, Anu Korhonen, and Anna Koivusalo, as well as to Phil Withington and the anonymous readers of the *Historical Journal*, for their comments and suggestions. This article was written with the support of the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the University of Helsinki.

1 *Spectator*, No. 591, 8 September 1714, (2nd edn, 8 vols., London, 1712–15), VIII, pp. 198–201.

2 *Spectator*, No. 99, 23 June 1711, II, pp. 95–100.

3 Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, sex and subordination in England 1500–1800* (New Haven, 1999), pp. 104, 377, ch. 6.

4 David M. Turner, *Fashioning Adultery: gender, sex and civility in England, 1660–1740* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 13–5. See also, for example, Anna Clark, 'Whores and gossips: sexual reputation in London 1770–1825', in Arina Angerman et al., eds., *Current issues in women's history* (London, 1989), pp. 231–48; Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's daughter: women's lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, 1998), p. 6.

5 G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of sensibility: sex and society in eighteenth-century Britain* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 127, 288–9; Ingrid Tague, *Women of quality: accepting and contesting ideals of femininity in England, 1690–1760* (Suffolk, 2002), pp.

30–5. Tague notes that the demand for female chastity was, in itself, nothing new; instead, what was new was the eighteenth-century view of women as naturally or innately chaste.

[6] Garthine Walker, 'Expanding the boundaries of female honour in early modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6 (1996), pp. 235–245. On men's honour, see Fletcher, *Gender*, ch. 7. According to Fletcher, gentleman's honour was 'the essence of his reputation in the eyes of his social equals'. (Fletcher, *Gender*, p. 126)

[7] Laura Gowing, 'Women, status and the popular culture of dishonour', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6 (1996), pp. 225–234, at p. 226.

[8] Faramerz Dabhoiwala, 'The Construction of honour, reputation and status in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6 (1996), pp. 201–213, at p. 208. See also Linda A. Pollock, 'Honor, gender, and reconciliation in elite culture, 1570–1700', *Journal of British Studies*, 46 (2007), pp. 3–29, at pp. 21–2, passim.; Michael McKeon, *The origins of the English novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 157–8; Bernard Capp, *When gossips meet: women, family and neighbourhood in modern England* (Oxford, 2003), p. 253; Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered society: gender and class in early modern England* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 119–20.

[9] Jenny Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the politics of politeness: manners and morals from Locke to Austen* (Cambridge, 2004), ch. 3, passim.

[10] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of self in everyday life* (New York, 1959), pp. 1–8, 22–30.

[11] See, for example, Phil Withington, *Society in early modern England: the vernacular origins of some powerful ideas* (Cambridge and Malden, MA, 2010), pp. 175–80; Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn Read McPherson, '"Shall I teach you to know?": intersections of pedagogy, performance, and gender', in Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn Read McPherson, eds., *Performing pedagogy in early modern England: gender, instruction and performance* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 1–20, at pp. 1–6.

[12] Laura Gowing, *Domestic dangers: women, words, and sex in early modern London* (Oxford, 1996), p. 28.

[13] Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English society, 1650–1850: the emergence of separate spheres?* (Harlow, 1998), p. 23.

[14] Jane Austen, *Pride and prejudice* [1813] (Harmondsworth, 1994), p. 221.

[15] Barker-Benfield, *Culture of sensibility*, pp. 288–9; Robert B. Shoemaker, 'The Taming of the duel: masculinity, honour and ritual violence in London, 1660–1800', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2002), pp. 525–45, at 542, passim.; McKeon, *English novel*, pp. 153–9.

[16] Robert L. Oprisko gives a detailed account of honour's cultural and social aspects in his book *Honor: a phenomenology* (New York, 2012), pp. 3–28, 40–61.

[17] McKeon, *English novel*, p. 156; Barker-Benfield, *Culture of sensibility*, p. 289; Shoemaker, 'Taming of the duel', p. 542. Recent research has emphasized the importance of inner virtue and restraint to early modern honour, as well. (See, for example, Pollock, 'Honor', pp. 9–16)

[18] Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in early modern England: civility, politeness and honour* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 10.

[19] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English language* (2nd edn, London, 1755–56)

[20] 'Be she honour-flaw'd, I have three daughters; the eldest is eleven; If this prove true, they'll pay for't.' (*The Winter's tale*); 'She dwells so securely on the excellency of her honour, that the folly of my soul dares not present itself: she is too bright to be looked against.' (*Merry wives of Windsor*). ('Honour' in Johnson, *Dictionary*) Some scholars have noted that there was a (mainly protestant) call for men's sexual purity, as well. (Barker-Benfield, *Culture of sensibility*, 176) Sexual reputation also played various roles in men's honour, depending on their social standing, age, and company. (Fletcher, *Gender*, pp. 83–98; Capp, *Gossips*, pp. 253–4) However, chastity was never presented as a defining part of gentlemanly honour; most scholars agree that there was a sexual 'double standard' that made men's sexual digressions far less incriminating than women's, (Shoemaker, *Gender in English society*, p. 23; Laura Gowing, *Domestic dangers*, pp. 2–4) and some claim that libertinism could even enhance a gentleman's reputation. (Dabhoiwala, 'Construction', p. 205; Markku Kekäläinen, *James Boswell's urban experience in eighteenth-century London* (Helsinki, 2012), pp. 23–4)

[21] *Spectator*, No. 99, 23 June 1711, II, pp. 95–100. For a similar analogy between chastity and courage, see, for example, *The Polite lady: or, a course of female education. In a series of letters, from a mother to her daughter* (London, 1760), p. 200.

[22] John Bennett, *Letters to a young lady, on a variety of useful and interesting subjects: calculated to improve the heart, to form the manners, and enlighten the understanding* (2 vols., Warrington, 1789), II, p. 44. The quotation is from Luke 14:34.

[23] According to Peltonen, the possibility of a man regaining his lost honour was a contested subject. (Peltonen,*Duel*, p. 35) However, it was presented as doable, whereas lost chastity was perceived as lost forever in the politeness discourse.

[24] 'Chastity' in Johnson, *Dictionary*.

[25] Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Fictions of modesty: women and courtship in the English novel* (Chicago and London, 1991), p. 8.

[26] See, for example, Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660–1800* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 76–7.

[27] Tague, *Women of Quality*, pp. 30–5. Laura Gowing touches on the same subject, noting that before around 1700, modesty was not regularly taken as a natural part of femininity, but a learned trait. (Laura Gowing, "'The Manner of

submission": gender and demeanour in seventeenth-century London', *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), pp. 25–45, at p. 28)

[28] For example, Hester Chapone (1777) and Hannah More (1799) rely heavily on religion, as well as nature, as the source and justification of the code of proper feminine behavior in their conduct books.

[29] Some scholars have timed the naturalization of chastity and politeness and the emergence of an essential self to the latter half of the eighteenth century. (Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the modern self: identity and culture in eighteenth-century England* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 7–8, passim.; Marisa Linton, 'Virtue rewarded? Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part II', *History of European Ideas*, 26 (2000), pp. 51–65, at 51) As Tague argues, it is, however, obvious that this development started already at the end of seventeenth century. For example, already *The Ladies calling* refers to female chastity as 'an instinct of nature'. (*The Ladies calling* [1673] (8th edn, Oxford, 1705), p. 16) Moreover, there was no abrupt change towards internalization, but, instead, both the internal and external view of polite identity remained influential throughout the eighteenth century. (See, for example, Markku Peltonen, 'Politeness and whiggism, 1688–1732', *Historical Journal*, 48 (2005), pp. 391–414, at pp. 394–5, passim.)

[30] Yeazell, *Fictions of modesty*, pp. 5–8.

[31] John Gregory, *A Father's legacy to his daughters* [1761] (6th edn, Dublin, 1774), p. 20.

[32] *The Ladies calling*, pp. 5–7, 17.

[33] *The Polite lady*, p. 225.

[34] *The Ladies calling*, p. 16.

[35] Yeazell, *Fictions of modesty*, p. 5; Bernard Mandeville, *A Modest defense of the public stews: or, an essay upon whoring. Written by a layman* (London, 1724), p. 49.

[36] Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the bees: or, private vices, publick benefits*, [1715/1729] ed. F. B. Kaye (2 vols., Oxford, 1924), I, pp. 142–3; Mandeville, *Public stews*, p. 41. See also Barker-Benfield, *Culture of sensibility*, p. 128.

[37] Mandeville, *Public stews*, p. 52.

[38] *The Polite lady*, p. 225.

[39] Ibid., p. 201.

[40] John Essex, *The Young ladies conduct: or, rules for education, under several heads* (London, 1722), p. 35.

[41] Laura Gowing, *Common bodies: women, touch and power in seventeenth-century England* (New Haven, 2003), pp. 204–5.

[42] Thomas Laqueur, *Making sex: body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), pp. 3–8, 152–4, passim. Laqueur's argument is that in early modern Europe, both men and women were thought in terms of one sex, of which women were only less perfect version. Gradually, somewhere between the seventeenth and nineteenth

century, one-sex view of men's and women's essential similarity was replaced by a two-sex view of their essential incommensurability and a modern model of biological divergence of the sexes.

[43] Hannah More, *Essays on various subjects, principally designed for young ladies* (London, 1777), title page, pp. 145, 78–9, 87–8; Hannah More, *Strictures on the modern system of female education* (2 vols., London, 1799), I, p. 142.

[44] Goffman, *Presentation of self*, pp. 22–30.

[45] *The Ladies calling*, 5–6.

[46] Ibid., 161.

[47] John Mullan, *Sentiment and sociability: the language of feeling in the eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 74, 112–113.

[48] Richard Steele, *The Ladies library*. [1714] (7th edn, 3 vols., London, 1772), I, 134.

[49] Fanny Burney, *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, [1778] eds. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford, 1982), 333. See also Yeazell, *Fictions of modesty*, pp. 133–5.

[50] John Burton, *Lectures on female education and manners* (2 vols., Rochester, 1793), I, pp. 212–3; *The Polite Lady*, p. 165.

[51] Burton, *Lectures*, I, p. 149.

[52] For example, Syrena, the heroine of Eliza Haywood's satire *Anti-Pamela* uses the feigned signs of innocence to lure men 'with a modest Blush, downcast Eyes, and all the Tokens of an Innocent Surprize (which she before had practised in her Glass)'. (Eliza Haywood, *Anti-Pamela: or, feign'd innocence detected* (London, 1741), p. 110)

[53] Henry Fielding, *An apology for the life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (London, 1741), p. 40.

[54] James Fordyce, *Sermons to young women* (6th edn, 2 vols., London, 1766) pp. 29, 31.

[55] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the education of daughters: with reflections on female conduct, in the more important duties of life* (London, 1787), p. 30. On women's dissimulation, see also e.g. Fordyce, *Sermons*, p. 62; Burton, *Lectures*, II, pp. 148, 158–9; More, *Strictures*, II, p. 47.

[56] On *Pamela* and hypocrisy, see Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, ch. 4.

[57] Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the culture of politeness: moral discourse and cultural politics in early eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 78–9, 185–5; John Locke, *Some thoughts concerning education*, [1693] eds. John W. Yolton and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford, 1989), p. 126.

[58] Phil Withington, '*Honestas*', in *Early modern theatricality*, ed. Henry S. Turner (Oxford, 2013), pp. 516–33, at p. 532.

[59] Peltonen, 'Politeness and whiggism', pp. 402–6.

[60] *The Polite lady*, p. 229.

[61] On setting and reputation, see Lawrence E. Klein, 'Politeness and the interpretation of the British eighteenth century', *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), pp. 869–98, at pp. 877, 886–9.

[62] Burton, *Lectures*, I, p. 200. See also Vickery, *Gentleman's daughter*, pp. 270–1.

[63] *The Lady's companion: or, an infallible guide to the fair sex* (4th edn, 2 vols., London, 1743), I, p. 14.

[64] Peter Borsay, *The English urban renaissance: culture and society in the provincial town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989), p. 150; Klein, 'Interpretation', pp. 886–8.

[65] Fanny Burney, *Camilla, or a picture of youth* [1796] (Oxford, 1983), p. 444.

[66] Burton, *Lectures*, I, p. 81.

[67] Ibid., I, p. 215.

[68] George Savile, marquis of Halifax, *The Lady's new year's gift: or, advice to a daughter* (3rd edn, London, 1688), p. 100.

[69] *The Ladies calling*, pp. 30–1.

[70] Hester Chapone, *Letters on the improvement of the mind* [1773] (New edn, London, 1777), p. 84; More, *Strictures*, II, p. 39; Burney, *Evelina*, p. 164.

[71] *The Polite lady*, p. 229; Fordyce, *Sermons*, p. 55.

[72] Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, p. 77; Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the rights of woman* [1792] (3rd edn, London, 1796), pp. 220–1, 308.

[73] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, pp. 299–300, 317–8.

[74] Ibid., p. 281.

[75] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance self-fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980), ch. 4; Amanda Bailey, *Flaunting: style and the subversive male body in Renaissance England* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 124–7; Karen Harvey, *The Little republic: masculinity and domestic authority in eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 130, 182–3.

[76] Dabhoiwala, 'Construction', p. 213. See also Kent R. Lehnhof, 'Acting virtuous: chastity, theatricality, and *The Tragedie of Mariam*', in Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn Read McPherson, eds., *Performing pedagogy in early modern England: gender, instruction and performance* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 217–32.

[77] Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: women, church, and nation, 1712–1812* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 84–91, 161–5.

[78] Yeazell, *Fictions of modesty*, p. 21; McKeon, *English novel*, p. 157. From this basis, McKeon claims that money was the reason for demanding chastity more systematically from elite women than from women of lower social status, since the inheritances of the lower ranks would have been considerably smaller.

[79] Anu Korhonen, 'Disability humour in English jestbooks of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Cultural History*, 3 (2014), pp. 27–53, at pp. 34–5; Elizabeth Foyster, 'A Laughing matter? Marital discord and gender control in seventeenth-century England', *Rural History*, 1 (1993), pp. 5–21, at pp. 7–9; Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous familiars: representations of domestic crime in England, 1550–1700* (Ithaca, 1994), p. 75; Capp, *Gossips*, pp. 193–5, 232–3.

[80] More, *Essays*, pp. 18–19; Burton, *Lectures*, I, p. 73.

[81] *The Polite lady*, p. 193.

[82] Ibid., p. 193. This argument was supposedly influential, because a gentlewoman's whole life was often aimed at getting married, since they had few other means of providing for themselves.

[83] Tague, *Women of quality*, pp. 33–4.

[84] See, for example, *The Polite lady*, pp. 195–8.

[85] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* [1814] (London, 1994), p. 470. Sexual immorality was thought to be contagious and easily passed from woman to woman, especially between close relatives. (Gowing, *Domestic dangers*, p. 99)

[86] Gowing, *Domestic dangers*, p. 94.

[87] Steele, *Ladies library*, I, p. 131.

[88] Burton, *Lectures*, I, p. 211. Another illustrious example can be found in *Pride and prejudice*, where Lydia's shame dramatically lessens her sisters' chances of decent matrimony. As Mr Collins graciously puts it: 'This false step in one daughter will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others; for who, as Lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family?' (Austen, *Pride and prejudice*, p. 227)

[89] Burton, *Lectures*, I, p. 73.

[90] Vickery, *Gentleman's daughter*, p. 228.

[91] *Spectator*, No. 492, 24 Sept. 1712, VII, 100–4.

[92] Chesterfield to his son, 8 Jan. 1750, in Eugenia Stanhope, ed., *Letters, written by the late right honourable Philip Dormer Stanhope, earl of Chesterfield, to his son* (6th edn, 4 vols., London, 1775), II, p. 317; Chestefield to his son, 14 Jan. 1751, in Stanhope, ed., *Letters*, III, p. 101.

[93] Steele, *Ladies library*, I, pp. 133–4.

[94] Tague, *Women of quality*, pp. 178–82.

[95] Lawrence E. Klein, 'Sociability, politeness, and aristocratic self-formation in the life and career of the second earl of Shelburne', *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), pp. 653–77, at pp. 659–60; Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England's aristocracy in the 1790s: pamphlets, polemics and political ideas* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 5–8, 56–84; Jorge Arditi, *A Genealogy of manners: transformations of social relations in France and England from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century* (Chicago, 1998), pp. 1–17, 221–8.

[96] Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator* [1744–6] (6th edn, 4 vols., London, 1766), I, p. 246; Vickery, *Gentleman's daughter*, p. 36.

[97] Vickery, *Gentleman's daughter*, p. 36.

[98] David Hume, *A Treatise of human nature*, [1739–40] ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (2nd edn, Oxford, 1978), p. 152.

[99] Abbé d'Ancourt, *The Lady's preceptor; or, a letter to a young lady of distinction upon politeness. Taken from the French … and adapted to the religion, customs, and manners of the English nation* (London, 1743), p. 46.

[100] Steele, *Ladies library*, I, p. 128.

[101] Fanny Burney to Charles Burney, 18 Apr. [1780], in Betty Rizzo, ed., *The Early journals and letters of Fanny Burney*: *Volume III, The Streatham Years, Part II: 1780–1781* (Montreal & Kingston, London, and Ithaca, 2003), p. 67.

[102] Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, eds., *A Biographical dictionary of actors, actresses, musicians, dancers, managers & other stage personnel in London, 1660–1800* (16 vols., Carbondale, ILL, 1993), XVI, pp. 225–7.

[103] Fanny Burney to Charles Burney, [17 July 1782], in Lars E. Troide and Stewart J. Cooke, eds., *The Early journals and letters of Fanny Burney: Volume V, 1782–1783*. (Montreal & Kingston, London, and Ithaca, 2012), p. 77.

[104] Henrietta Knight to Robert Knight, [1736], The British Library (BL), Add. MS 45889, fos. 7–8, 9–10. See also Tague, *Women of quality*, pp. 180–1.

[105] Kathleen M. Lynch, *A Congreve gallery* (Cambridge, MA, 1951), pp. 60–8.

[106] Tague, *Women of quality*, pp. 180.

[107] Tague, *Women of quality*, pp. 95, 180. Marisa Linton makes a similar argument concerning eighteenth-century France, claiming that, especially for the higher classes, a liaison was considered less shocking than flaunting it publicly. (Marisa Linton, 'Virtue rewarded? women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part I', *History of European Ideas*, 26 (2000), pp. 35–49, at p. 43)

[108] Horace Walpole, *Reminiscences: written in 1788, for the amusement of Miss Mary and Miss Agnes B... y* (London, 1819), p. 52.

[109] Walpole, *Reminiscences*, p. 53.

[110] James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, eds. Bruce Redford and Elizabeth Goldring (4 vols., New Haven, 1998), II, p. 105; Horace Walpole to Mason, 8 Aug. 1780, in W. S. Lewis et al., eds., *The Yale edition of Horace Walpole's correspondence* (48 vols., London, 1937–83), XXIX, pp. 72–3; Horace Walpole to John Pinkerton, 30 Sept. 1785, in Lewis et al., eds., *Correspondence*, XXVI, pp. 281–2.

[111] Hannah Greig, *The Beau monde: fashionable society in Georgian London* (Oxford, 2013), p. 202.

[112] Greig, *Beau monde*, p. 200.